Tainted Witness: Why We Doubt What Women Say About Their Lives. By Leigh Gilmore. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017. 240 pp. $30.00 (hardcover), $22.00 (paperback).

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First-person testimony, Leigh Gilmore explains, is a distinct genre that is thought to be much closer to a person's identity than other forms of writing (reportage, fiction, etc.), where the "I" of the writer is not under the same scrutiny as the writing itself. When the person testifying is believed, the veracity gained from its authentic nature gives it unusual force, but as soon as the witness becomes tainted by shame, scandal, or charges of mendacity — and this will almost inevitably happen to women — both the author and the testimony are thoroughly excoriated. How and why does this process happen over and over again? What happens to these accounts over time? Gilmore's book is a response to these questions through an examination of cases that range from Anita Hill's testimony in Congress to Rigoberta Menchú's *testimonio* about the Guatemalan genocide to Nafissatou Diallo, the hotel worker who accused Dominique Strauss-Kahn of rape in 2011. By tracing the public conversation about their testimonies of harm, particularly sexual harm, Gilmore makes a persuasive case that the moment when a woman's account is taken as credible by the public and the justifiable basis for an investigation into the accused's actions lasts barely an instant. The trope of the untrustworthy woman quickly takes precedence. Always the perception is that there must be another (conflicting) side to the story, most salient in the terminology of "he said/she said" as a shorthand way to refer to claims of sexual assault, and in the refrain of we "will never know what really happened." Although these concerns are present in any legal or adversarial situation, when there is a woman testifying about bodily injury, these refrains become a way to end the inquiry before it even begins. Moreover, the convention that women are not credible hastens the life cycle of a testimony such that before there can be any context for the harm described, there has already been a rush to judgment that deems the testimony inconsistent, manipulative, or motivated by vengeance.

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Gilmore's prose is cogent and measured, and the dramatic valence of the harms she describes and the experiences of the women she features are the focus of the book. The fact that the book was published concurrently with the birth of #MeToo movement, in which so many women's testimonies have been the focus of public conversation, is fortuitous. Her book is a primer on the conventional trajectory of such testimonies, but it also offers hope for how we might become better audiences, more adequate witnesses as she describes it, in part through understanding that while scandal may quickly curtail interest in a woman's testimony in one domain, this is not the end of its existence. These testimonies will continue to circulate, picked up for new ends and new meanings, until they reach adequate witnesses in ways that cannot be foretold. Even though legal norms are one of the most potent tools used to discredit women, Gilmore shows how there may be a redemptive legal moment in the afterlife of testimonies, such as with the successful 2015 prosecution of the Guatamalan police chief who killed Menchú's father in 1980.

One of the great contributions of this book for scholars of violence, trauma, and testimony is the way Gilmore explicates the perpetual elision of legal and nonlegal concerns raised by the public when women speak about harms. In the case of Anita Hill, no amount of clarification on her part could change the perception that she wanted to punish Clarence Thomas or in some way sanction him. The issue is reprised again when critics wonder why women are writing about the sexual violations of powerful men with dismissive statements such as, "It's not like he is Harvey Weinstein," implying that lesser violations should not be given public attention because the same legal sanctions are not relevant. The senators questioning Anita Hill conveniently forgot that she was subpoenaed to testify and that there were other women on hand to corroborate Thomas' pattern of workplace behavior. Instead, she was maligned for her romantic past and accused of harboring outsized professional ambition. When the woman giving testimony is (wrongly) thought to be asking for formal punishment, it immediately leads the audience to a posture of skepticism, in part because of the standard used in a criminal trial where the state must prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. This legal convention, though valuable for the protection of defendants in a court of law, is overly stringent as a default attitude toward any woman speaking about harm. An audience who begins with doubt and seeks to redouble it magnifies inconsistencies and speculates about the testifier's motivations; it never

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needs to deepen the story and ask about the context that gave rise to the harm because the telos of doubt in its legal context is acquittal. Gilmore asks what it might look like to move away from such an orientation and finds the answer in engaging with testimony as a *literary witness*. She writes, "When histories and contexts for understanding witnesses have been destroyed by slavery and colonialism, displaced by migration, and reshaped by the demands to shape one's story according to bureaucratic and legal requirements, literature offers a density of affect beyond sympathy or suspicion, suspends judgment, and permits undecidability as value" (146).

The density of affect literature allows an audience member to move away from empathy as the base requirement for taking testimonies seriously. Gilmore argues that this focus on empathy leads to several of the impossible demands made on women who offer testimony, including inordinate value placed on their innocence and vulnerability, traits that are in such high demand that it may be strategically necessary to let white males speak for them. This is a fascinating phenomenon she describes using the case of Greg Mortenson (*Three Cups of Tea*) and Nicholas Kristof with Sheryl WuDunn (*Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*). Assuming the role of a literary witness allows one to investigate and learn from unlikeable and potentially unreliable witnesses, a task that is central to understanding the effects of harm on moral and social life. Patricia Williams' controversial 1991 statement that Tawana Brawley "has been the victim of some unspeakable crime. No matter how she got there. Not matter who did it to her and even if she did it to herself" sets an affective and intellectual standard for Gilmore in thinking about testimony (145). It is a standard of openness and humility given the plethora of human experiences that we are ill-equipped to understand. In light of these failings, we must attend to the testimonies of others. It has become commonplace for those accused of falsifying details to say that they were conveying the truth of the event, even if the chronology is not factually correct. One reaction to this is frustration and perhaps rightly so, but Gilmore is suggesting that this excuse is also true, especially for victims of trauma, and we can become the audiences that these testimonies deserve.

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